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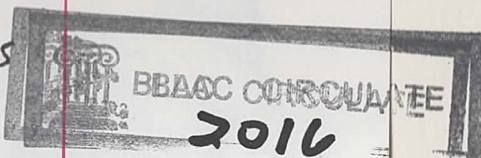
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# U.S. Military Involvement in EL SALVADOR 1947-1980

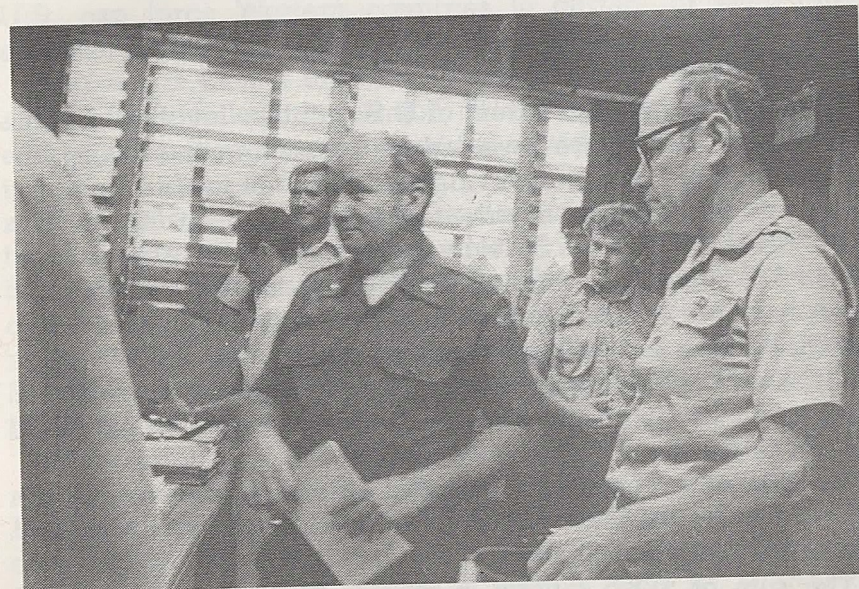




80% of the population has no running  
water, electricity or sanitary services  
90% show signs of malnutrition  
16% work year round  
40% illiteracy rate  
1 out of 4 children die before the  
age of five  
average life span: 46 years

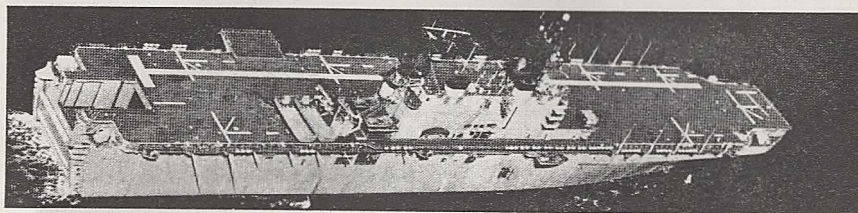


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right: U.S. military advisor Cummings  
left: Head of the Salvadorean High Command & General of the  
Armed Forces Adolfo Castillo  
Picture taken May 12, 1980 at San Salvador Armed Forces  
Headquarters





## I. INTRODUCTION

The significance and extent of U.S. military involvement in El Salvador can not be revealed by presenting the available data alone, for much of the evidence is difficult to obtain and is often only revealed by accident. For example, on March 18, 1974, the U.S. Customs Service announced that its agents had seized \$22.5 million in military helicopter parts that were being illegally shipped from Long Beach, California to El Salvador.<sup>1</sup> Another telling example is the following: On May 16, 1976, the chief of staff of El Salvador's armed forces was arrested in New York and charged with plotting (with 6 other men) a \$2.8 million sale of arms.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the insufficiency of official data in revealing the true extent of U.S. military involvement, these examples reveal very important points:

—The sum of \$22.5 million is greater than all *official* U.S. military aid to El Salvador between 1946 and 1979.

—Via illegal channels, U.S. multinationals (and other agencies) could send arms to defend their economic interests. The example of ITT's role in the overthrow of Allende in Chile should be a sufficient proof that multinationals are involved in such practices. The role of United Fruit (United Brands) in the politics of Honduras is also well known. This company had armed bands and planes of its own in Honduras. Litton Industry's critical role in the 1967 coup in Greece and Firestone's influence in Liberia are some other well known cases<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, there are well known instances in which the CIA provided military assistance to various countries through illegal channels.

—It is very difficult to separate the effects of "illegal" military aid from legal, official military aid. And, most importantly:

—These examples suggest clearly that other such practices may have been taking place (we shall show later that this is indeed the case).

An additional difficulty in evaluating the real extent of U.S. military aid to El Salvador is that Israel, France, Venezuela and Brazil are major suppliers of arms, often U.S.-made, to El Salvador (see Appendix 1). While these arms were not supplied by the U.S., clearly these countries would not have sent arms without U.S. consent, or rather, without U.S. recommendation. The recent (mid-April 1980) experience in Iran shows that the U.S. can force Western countries to curtail, or even cut, economic relations.

That this is in fact the case is revealed in a U.S. official's answer to the following question: "How do they [the Salvadorean regime] accept security assistance without being branded imperialist stooges?" His reply: "The Salvadorean civilians suggested [to the U.S.] the involvement of other Western countries in a multilateral assistance effort."<sup>4</sup> Toward the implementation of this suggestion, William Bowdler, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, traveled to Spain and West Germany to discuss their participation. On February 24, 1980, the Salvadorean government announced it had received \$5 million in aid from West Germany.

Arms supplies do not comprise the totality of foreign military aid. In a recent interview with the Mexican journalist Mario Menendez Rodriguez, South African Ambassador to El Salvador, Archibald Dunn, said: "I have consciously served the Government of South Africa; I identify with its apartheid policy. The presidents and military commanders of El Salvador have honored me with their friendship and at times have requested my advice, which, as a good friend and in order to serve the government, I have been happy to offer. . . . I can say the same thing in regard to Nicaragua where I also served as Ambassador."

It should be noted that while all these countries profit from arms sales to El Salvador, U.S. multinationals gain much more through the protection, with these arms, of their interests in this country. Clearly, then, U.S. overall military aid to El Salvador cannot be inferred from its *direct* military aid alone. It is within this context that one can grasp the strong relationship between the U.S. and the present oligarchical-military regime—the guardian of U.S. interests.



## THE SCOPE AND CHARACTER OF U.S. INVOLVEMENT

The foregoing remarks indicate the difficulty of evaluating U.S. military involvement in El Salvador. We shall therefore start with some examples of statements by U.S. officials which will show the *real* intentions and scope of U.S. interests.

First, that El Salvador must be regarded in a context broader than itself in the framework of U.S. military involvement became clear with the creation of CONDECA (Central American Defense Council) in 1964. It was established by the ministers of defense of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, all of which were under military regimes. The purpose of such a council was to coordinate and centralize military command of the region under U.S. military supervision (the U.S. Southern Command in Panama). In order to quicken the process of CONDECA's formation, the U.S. sponsored a series of joint military maneuvers, called "Operation Brotherhood." The armies of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua participated in this exercise.

CONDECA's structure allows for dominant U.S. military influence in Central America; and it minimizes the cost to the U.S. The staff of CONDECA (closely supervised by the CIA) is composed of high level representatives of the armies and security offices of Central America. Joint military maneuvers were carried out twice a year.

In 1966, a series of war games (Operation Nicaro) was held in Honduras. In 1972, Guatemala and Nicaragua helped the Salvadorean military defeat a coup by the Christian Democrat, Jose Napoleon Duarte (a member of the present junta) after a fraudulent election. The action against this coup was planned by Colonel Carlos Guzman, the head of the Salvadorean mission to Washington. Local leadership was provided by the Salvadorean Minister of Defense (later president of CONDECA) General Fidel Torres. Combat planes from Guatemala and Nicaragua bombed the military bases that were in rebel hands.

Almost simultaneously, President Figueres of Costa Rica announced that an invasion to overthrow his government was being planned by a right-wing paramilitary group (Costa Rica Libre). Foreign Minister Facio charged publicly that this group was operating in conjunction with its counterpart in Guatemala, Mano Blanca. The Costa Rican representative to CONDECA (Colonel Delcore) was arrested for his alleged complicity in the plot. In 1976, CONDECA intervened in Nicaragua and

in 1977, in Guatemala. CONDECA's forces, led by U.S. General Dennis McAuliffe, head of the Southern Command, carried out counterinsurgency military operations, known as operations Aguila 6 and 7, against the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

One of the major tasks of CONDECA has been the protection of U.S. (multinationals') interests in Central America and Latin America. General Robert Porter, the Commanding General of the U.S. Southern Command until 1969, said that Central America was important strategically "because it permits access by relatively defensible routes to the raw materials of South America." An even more important reason for U.S. interest in regional "stability" is access to Mexico's great oil reserves, as is control over the Panama Canal.

A 1979 Department of Defense document makes clear that the nature and objectives of the U.S. role in El Salvador and the region have not changed qualitatively during the last two decades: "United States interests [in El Salvador] are derived from our larger concerns for regional stability in Central America. Through a modest security assistance program, we are able to maintain communication with El Salvador's military establishment which is the country's most important political force."<sup>5</sup>

Thus we can conclude that:

- the U.S. has an overall strategy to secure its interests in Central America, of which El Salvador is part;
- as long as its interests are secure, the U.S. will support even the cruelest regimes;
- this is in order to preserve "regional stability," i.e., no threat to U.S. (multinationals') interests.

It must be understood that this "stability" does not exclude violence. Violence which promotes "stability" is *supported* by the U.S. The real meaning of "communication with El Salvador's military establishment" (this establishment which was murdering people by the hundreds, and which was devoid of any democratic participation of the people), is the active and leading role played in these atrocities by the United States. We should note particularly some of the following aspects of U.S. regional strategy:

- the leading role that the U.S. plays in its relations with the OAS;
- the nature of this (and the OAS) role, namely, to "restore



stability"—which in the reality of many Latin American countries, including El Salvador, means increasing 'violence,' i.e., repression;

—that actually the U.S. role increasingly means "a buildup of U.S. forces" and "a return to the days of large U.S. military advisory groups in Latin America".

The full extent of U.S. military involvement cannot be appreciated as long as it is not clear that military aid and economic aid are, to a great extent, complementary. When both are directed at achieving the same effects, the distinction between the strictly military role and the economic aid is misleading. Economic aid which helps the ruling military is essentially a different form of U.S. support of the prevailing regime which guarantees "stability."

Computers can serve as one example of an "economic" aid which should be classified as a military aid. According to *Computer Decisions* (February 1977) such equipment is used by security agencies in some Latin American countries to keep track of dissidents and to pinpoint individuals for arrest, interrogation and assassination. This journal states explicitly: "Latin American dictators are using computers as tools of repression."

Thus U.S. military and economic aid is not only strengthening the military but, more importantly, it is actually *promoting* repression, this in contrast to the U.S. stated policy of "human rights."

## II. U.S. DIRECT MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN EL SALVADOR

U.S. direct military involvement in El Salvador has at least four major elements:

- 1) U.S. military supply of arms to the ruling junta;
- 2) U.S. military training of Salvadorean armed forces;
- 3) U.S. military personnel in El Salvador;
- 4) U.S. military training and supplies to other regimes in the region with the intention of actually supporting the junta in its efforts to crush the mounting popular resistance to its atrocities. This last issue will be discussed in Section III.

### SUPPLY OF ARMS

U.S. military involvement became increasingly important following World War II, when El Salvador received its first U.S. grants under the Military Assistance Program (MAP), as well as

the first U.S. military mission.

Between the years 1950 and 1979, officially sponsored security assistance from the U.S. to El Salvador totaled \$16.72 million (see Appendices 2 & 3). If we take the total aid (see Appendix 2) then we get the following results: in the period 1950-69 aid was approximately \$8.1 million; in the period 1970-75 it was \$7.02 million; in 1976 it was \$2.2 million. (In 1977, ostensibly as a result of Carter's human rights policy, El Salvador refused to accept U.S. aid. Thus, U.S. military aid in 1977 was "only" \$1.02 million. In 1978, it was \$303,000. As is shown in Appendix 1, however, massive military aid from Israel, France, and Brazil was delivered during these years.) Thus, while the average annual U.S. military aid during the period 1950-69 was approximately \$400,000, in the period 1970-75 it was approximately \$1,400,000, an increase of 250%. In 1976 U.S. military aid increased again by 57%.

It is with this background that one can better understand the recently approved \$5.7 million security assistance from the U.S. to El Salvador for 1980, the \$50 million in "economic" aid, and the \$5.2 million in military aid for sales and training credits for fiscal year 1981. This aid is complemented by substantial (over \$100 million) loans by the International Monetary Fund. In the next two years, expected U.S. military aid to El Salvador will increase annually by another 150%.

These figures still do not convey the totality of foreign military aid to El Salvador. We mentioned earlier the indirect role which the U.S. takes through its allies. Since 1974, Israel, France, and later, Brazil played important roles in supplying arms (see Appendix 1). It is clear, therefore, that the 1970's brought a rapid escalation in U.S. (and its allies) military aid to El Salvador. This aid increasingly became one of the major factors which sustained the oligarchy-military control over this country, and has contributed to the increasing brutality of the regime.

### U.S. MILITARY TRAINING

The U.S. trained 1,925 Salvadorean officers during the period 1950-76.<sup>1</sup> In the period 1970-75, training of foreign military personnel at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, Panama Canal Zone, included 298 Salvadoreans, 108 of whom were trained for basic combat and counterinsurgency (see Appendix 4). The result was that "...our security assistance pro-



gram facilitates our overall relations with the government of El Salvador and fosters useful professional contacts with key members of the Salvadorean armed forces."<sup>2</sup> This statement is a good example of the intentions and implications of U.S. assistance. The U.S. consciously tries to strengthen its relations with the higher echelons of the army—to the extent that these contacts are "useful" in practice (i.e., they promote U.S. interests in the region).

In 1957, the U.S. instituted a Public Safety Program under the auspices of the Agency for International Development (AID), which undertook "...to develop the managerial and operational skills and effectiveness of [Salvadorean] civil police forces."<sup>3</sup> This "effectiveness" has caused, in practice, the murder and disappearance of thousands of Salvadoreans in the 1970's and 1980. Between 1957 and 1974 (the program's termination), the Office of Public Safety spent \$2.1 million to train 448 Salvadorean police and provide arms, communications equipment, transport vehicles, and riot control gear. Thus, a closer relationships between the U.S. defense and political authorities and the Salvadorean police has developed.

It must be emphasized that the U.S. role in training the police was the major factor in making the police an effective and "efficient" instrument of the oligarchy and a guardian of U.S. interests. We see this in the AID analysis which says "...the National Police...has advanced from a non-descript, cuartel-bound group of poorly trained men to a well-disciplined, well-trained, and respected uniformed corps. It has good riot control capability, good investigative capability, good records, and fair communications and mobility."<sup>4</sup> Many of those trained in the program occupied "key" positions in the Salvadorean security establishment.

An additional revealing aspect of this program is that while between the years 1957-1963 it was directed mainly towards training the National Police, from 1963 to 1974, the program's emphasis shifted to the National Guard. The National Guard became much more directly involved (and has since become more and more so) in the repression of working people, especially the peasants.

### **U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL IN EL SALVADOR**

The scanty available information does not enable us to give an exhaustive account of U.S. personnel in El Salvador. It must

be clear, however, from the previous sections, that by training, by constant contacts with key members of the security forces, and by supplying arms, the role of U.S. personnel in El Salvador was until recently not the most important for the achievement of U.S. objectives. In the final section we shall show, however, that this role has become more and more important since Romero was ousted in October 1974.

The presence of U.S. military personnel in El Salvador immediately after World War II was revealed recently by Murat W. Williams, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador from 1961 to 1964.<sup>5</sup> Williams says, "In 1948, we sent our first military mission to El Salvador, a group from the United States Air Force. (We already had an Army officer in charge of training at the Salvadorean military academy.) By 1961...we had both a large Army mission and Air Force mission. In fact, there were more men in the Air Force mission than El Salvador had either pilots or planes." On another occasion Williams said that after the coup of Colonel Julio Rivera in 1961, "...aid from us soon included a heavy military component," and "We even had a few Green Berets there."<sup>6</sup> In 1963, and in the preceding years, there were five U.S. military advisers stationed in El Salvador to oversee the training and management of the Public Safety Program discussed in the last section.

With the increasing arms sales to El Salvador in the 1970's, it can be assumed that the number of U.S. advisers of all sorts also increased. Even during 1977-78, when U.S. military aid to El Salvador was suspended, the U.S. maintained a military assistance group in El Salvador.<sup>7</sup>

In February 1977, when Romero took power after an election that was internationally recognized as fraudulent, protests and demonstrations escalated, culminating on February 28 when police and the National Guard began firing on demonstrators. During the following days, hundreds of people were killed. These events brought U.S. human rights policy into conflict with the Salvadorean regime and led to a temporary halt in U.S. aid to El Salvador. What was not officially reported, but was verified by eyewitnesses, was the involvement of U.S. personnel in directing the Salvadorean police and soldiers in their confrontations with, and shooting at, the people. This is another instance where U.S. policy-in-words appears to be contradicted by actual U.S. involvement.



### III. THE CURRENT SITUATION

In the context of U.S. military involvement in El Salvador, the most important aspect of the current situation is that U.S. allies in El Salvador—the oligarchy and the various security forces—are confronting stronger and stronger popular, democratic and revolutionary forces. Internally, the oligarchy and the security forces are completely isolated, having lost even token support of the middle class and part of the bourgeoisie, and confronted by the great militancy of peasants and workers. On April 11, 1980, the Democratic Revolutionary Front was created, comprised of 150 organizations representing all the popular forces and the traditional democratic opposition. Its hundreds of thousands of members are unionists, teachers, slumdweller, professionals, technicians, market vendors, religious figures, university rectors, and children. The Front is currently seeking diplomatic recognition by the U.N. and by governments as the representative of the Salvadorean people under the terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords.

This situation, the culmination of a long process which reached an apparent new level with the ousting of Romero in October 1979, has strengthened the regime's need to resort to outright force in repressing its fierce opposition. Internationally, the present Salvadorean regime is supported—materially and very vocally—by the United States.

Against this background, the most important aspects of the U.S. military role in (and its effects on) the present situation are the following:

- the increasing violence and brutality of the Salvadorean regime;
- the increase in U.S. military support to prevent the overthrow of the present regime and the present state apparatus;
- the increasing need for U.S. organization and coordination of other regimes in the region in preparation for their direct support of the shaky Salvadorean regime, including the possibility of their direct massive military intervention.

It must be understood that these measures are necessary for preventing the overthrow of the present regime and the economic, military and legal system on which it has been based. A victory by the popular-democratic forces means not only the loss of the privileges of the oligarchy, the army and the police, but also the loss of the extremely favorable conditions under

which U.S. multinationals are allowed to extract a significant share of El Salvador's wealth, as well as further losing control of this strategic region. It is because of the threat to these most basic interests of the oligarchy and the U.S. that the above measures have become a necessity. At present, no other option is left to them.

#### VIOLENCE BY THE JUNTA AGAINST THE PEOPLE

The escalation of repression, and the increasing number of murders by the police, army, and paramilitary forces are well known. We shall, therefore, dwell on it only briefly.

Of the more than 5,000 persons who have been killed since the beginning of 1980, the majority were murdered by the various security forces, despite U.S. State Department and press claims that only "right-wing terrorists" have been involved. The assassination of Archbishop Romero in March highlights the regime's brutality. The state of siege imposed on March 6 for 30 days has been extended indefinitely. Even these facts alone are sufficient in establishing the existence of state violence.

#### DIRECT U.S. MILITARY PARTICIPATION

In November 1979, the U.S. government authorized the sale of \$206,000 worth of tear gas, gas masks, and protective vests to El Salvador's security forces. A six-man U.S. military team arrived in El Salvador on November 12, to train security forces in riot control. On December 15, 1979, a military operation was carried out against LP-28 (a popular organization) members who occupied the hacienda El Porvenir in El Congo. Nearly 100 people were killed. U.S. soldiers participated, according to eyewitnesses.<sup>1</sup>

On January 23, 1980, Marines in custody of the U.S. Embassy captured two student members of the BPR (another popular organization) and later turned them over to the National Guard. The two students were later listed as "disappeared." On January 24-25, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, William Bowdler, arrived in San Salvador for meetings with the junta. After his departure, the junta announced that the U.S. would make "millions of dollars of aid" available to the junta.

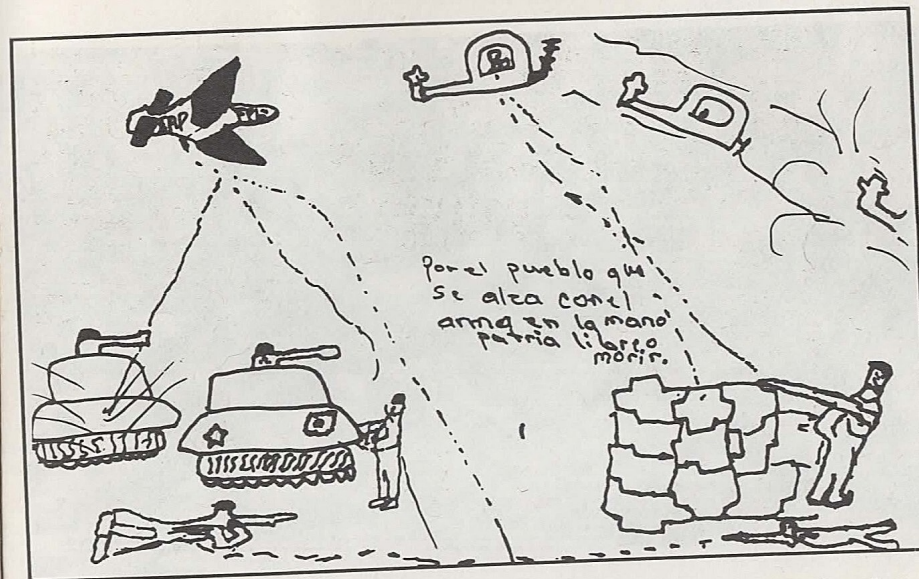
At the end of February and the beginning of March, U.S. Mobile Military Training Teams arrived in El Salvador. They are training Salvadorean army personnel in up-to-date counterinsurgency methods at three training centers: in San Francisco



Gotera in the southeast; Zacatecoluca in the south; and Chalatenango in the northeast (see map). These centers are also part of the four fortified helicopter bases being constructed in the countryside under Pentagon supervision. During the same period, Marines landed in the port of La Union, on a small island in the Gulf of Fonseca which separates El Salvador and Nicaragua. This region has been used by right-wing groups to "smuggle" large quantities of arms. The island, called Manguera, now contains a naval base. It should be noted that these locations are strategically located throughout El Salvador; furthermore, the use of Guatemala and Honduras closes the U.S.-defined circle allows for more complete control of the region, keeping El Salvador surrounded.

On March 30, 1980, at the funeral of Archbishop Oscar Romero, U.S. advisers took part in the army attack on mourners.<sup>2</sup> Sixty to one hundred people were killed and 500 wounded. The president of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador said that "...on the day of Romero's funeral, North Americans were spotted in the atrium of the cathedral and others outside were speaking English over walkie-talkies." The president of this Commission also said that "many peasants, especially in the Aguilares area, have reported seeing English-speaking people directing the squads that come to carry out repression," and that "union militants in San Salvador... say they were interrogated by North Americans speaking in very poor Spanish."

Finally, on May 2, in an abortive right-wing coup, an implicated role was played by the United States. First, it is significant to note that the leader of the coup, D'Abuisson, who is the head of the right-wing death squad White Warriors Union and the Broad National Front (A coalition of right-wing groups, dominated by ORDEN), visited the U.S. in April. He was the guest of the American Security Council. Secondly, upon the arrest of D'Abuisson, the police took from him a list of four U.S. Senators who were presumed to be sympathetic with the attempted coup. They are Strom Thurmond, Richard Stone, Harry Byrd, and Sam Hayakawa.



*These pictures show how the lives of children have been deeply affected by the repression in El Salvador.*



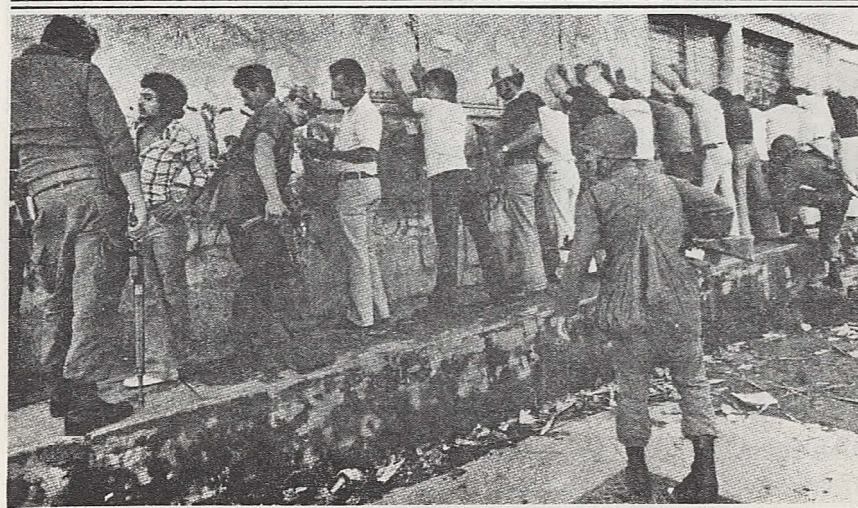




*Result of a peaceful occupation of the Christian Democratic Party headquarters, Spring 1980*



*Salvadorean security forces stormed the University following June general strike.*







*January 22, 1980 demonstration celebrating the coordination of the popular forces*

## U.S. POLICY AND ACTIONS TAKEN BY OTHER REGIMES IN THE REGION IN SUPPORT OF THE SALVADOREAN JUNTA

The geographical framework of U.S. military involvement in El Salvador must encompass at least Central America and the Caribbean. This is the context within which U.S. military involvement has actually been taking place; and only within this context is it possible to appreciate and understand the dimension, the seriousness, and the danger of U.S. military involvement in El Salvador.

U.S. policy has always explicitly taken into account the interdependence of the whole region. A State Department policy maker has recently said: "We are prepared to swing with change and ready to get in there and fight it out. We are not going to be left behind and out of it. Our national interest is involved and we owe it to Central America."<sup>3</sup> And, "Should El Salvador fall to extremists [sic], it could not help but unsettle neighboring Guatemala and Honduras, State Department officials argue, in a Central American version of the falling-domino theory. Whether the shock waves would drift across the Caribbean Sea to some of the young Caribbean republics now also facing leftist upheaval is unclear."<sup>4</sup> These quotes also indicate the U.S. view that El Salvador is the lynchpin of the growing regional threat to U.S. interests.

A different version of the same theme is: "The old order is disintegrating; first Nicaragua, now El Salvador—with Honduras and Guatemala waiting in the wings."<sup>5</sup> This is how Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America William Bowdler perceives the situation. Another analyst added, "First Nicaragua, now El Salvador, then Honduras, Guatemala... Even Costa Rica is not safe." Lt. General Wallace Nutting, who heads the U.S. Southern Command forces based in Panama, said: "The revolution in Nicaragua has led the United States to crystallize its effort to reassess, to grapple with some decisions. We are involved in a very fundamental change."

Regarding the Caribbean, on October 1, 1979, Carter said that the U.S. would establish a permanent, full time Caribbean Joint Task Force with headquarters at Key West.

Just before the Nonaligned Conference in Havana in September 1979, U.S. authorities invoked the threat of Russians in Cuba. Then, Vance said that the U.S. had known about these Russians 17 years ago. And an April 1980 *Washington Post* arti-



cle stated: "Bushnell [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State] and Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance both invoked the Cuban threat on Capitol Hill last month [March] at a time when the administration wanted to win approval for a small package of military aid to the junta [in El Salvador]."<sup>6</sup>

The article continues, "But, in private, top State Department officials and U.S. diplomats on the scene play down the Cuban role." One experienced U.S. diplomat in the region says, "My opinion is that if Cuba did not exist, it wouldn't make a helluva lot of difference." Thus, at present, the real threat to the U.S. is El Salvador and not Cuba in the eyes of U.S. authorities themselves. Accordingly, it follows that actual U.S. policy is at present directly mainly toward El Salvador, with the proximity of Cuba used as a convenient pretext for intervention. It should be noted that the Mexican foreign minister has rejected the U.S. claims of Cuban involvement in El Salvador.

Following policy declarations come their actual implementation. Although the available information is quite meager, we shall now show that the U.S. is moving swiftly to implement its policy in the region. That this must be carried out rapidly stems especially from the accelerating process of revolutionary transformation that El Salvador has been undergoing.

In the previous section we discussed the significant increase of U.S. military personnel in El Salvador. Garcia, the president of the Human Rights Commission quoted earlier, said that "ships have been observed unloading munitions at the port of Acajutla. Four truckloads of rifles and munitions have left Acajutla on the way to San Salvador." If these ships did not come directly from the U.S., they must have done so with its permission or its encouragement. In March a shipment of weapons from the U.S. destined for El Salvador was discovered when a plane carrying submachine guns and ammunition of various calibers crashed in Mexico. On April 9, the Miami-based Consul General for El Salvador, a Salvadorean Army major and the director of El Salvador's telephone system were arrested after they were caught trying to smuggle riot shotguns, rifles, rounds of ammunition, and other military items.

These instances highlight the impossibility of estimating accurately the extent and value of U.S. military support. It is clear that official figures significantly underestimate the *real* volume of U.S. military assistance to the Salvadorean junta and army. This underestimation is especially great in the last months.

We shall now focus more closely on the role played by other countries in the region and the key U.S. position in it.

### THE CARIBBEAN

Since October 1979, the U.S. has increased its surveillance (mainly of Cuba), expanded its military maneuvers, and increased sales of military equipment to governments in the Caribbean.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. announced that it would conduct military maneuvers in this region for three weeks starting on May 9. The operation, called "Solid Shield 80," included more than 20,000 troops, 42 ships, and 350 planes.<sup>8</sup>

### HONDURAS

The importance of Honduras in the strategy against the social transformation taking place in El Salvador is due to its long common border with El Salvador and the underpopulated mountainous areas along the eastern part of that border, which provide protection for the Salvadorean people's forces.

On March 23rd, columnist Jack Anderson revealed that "in secret meetings with the Pentagon's emissary, Major General Robert L. Schweitzer, the Honduran military junta was told specifically that it is expected to assume the regional role played for years by Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza—to become a bulwark of anti-communism against the pressures of popular revolt."<sup>9</sup> Anderson continues, "The Carter Administration, rebuffed embarrassingly in Nicaragua and unable to influence events effectively in Guatemala and El Salvador, has seized upon Honduras as the opportunity for a show of strength."

Anderson makes it absolutely clear that the U.S. objective in the region, determined by its interests, is to lead and organize the anti-democratic and anti-popular regimes on a regional level. This is the actual policy carried out by the U.S. (and not its policy-in-words). It is, again, interesting to note that, in contrast to the clear meaning of this quotation regarding the real U.S. policy in the region, Assistant Secretary of State, James Cheek, charged in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa on April 1 that the Cuban government was shipping arms through Honduras to Salvadorean guerrillas. The reaction from a Latin American specialist at the State Department to this charge was "...that the statements were 'disgusting'" according to the *Latin America Weekly Report*, April 4, 1980. This specialist continued, "While I would not claim that there is no Cuban involvement, I strongly believe that this approach to a crisis which is overwhelmingly caused by internal factors constitutes



a terrible distortion of reality." This view was strongly backed by a senior staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In February 1980, the Honduran junta's chief, Brig. General Policarpo Paz Garcia, met with President Carter. In April, the U.S. announced \$59 million in economic aid, \$4.25 million in military aid, and the loan of ten helicopter gunships to Honduras. And recently, observers report that exiled Nicaraguan National Guardsmen in Honduras have moved their camps from the southern border with Nicaragua to the western border with El Salvador.<sup>10</sup>

### GUATEMALA

On March 26 and 27, the U.S. Navy destroyer USS *Manley* visited Guatemala.<sup>11</sup> The ship's captain met with Guatemalan military leaders. The visit, according to a leading Guatemala newspaper, "reflects... the good relations and cordiality existing between the U.S. and Guatemalan governments and particularly between the armed forces of the two countries." This is another good example of the nature of U.S. relations with the countries in the region. However, Guatemala either refused or was denied U.S. military aid since 1977 because of its human rights record (20,000 Guatemalans killed in the last 10 years, "primarily by rightist death squads allegedly allied with the military") according to the same article. In the last year, according to the National Police, rightist death squads killed 3,252 people, while leftist guerrillas killed 81.

Even on April 11, 1980, two weeks after the Navy's visit, State Department officials initially denied any visit when questioned by the Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs.

Recall that on October 1, 1979, "Carter vowed that the United States would expand our military maneuvers in the region, ... monitor the status of its countries, and form a permanent, full-time joint Caribbean Task Force." In November, only a month later, and in December, the task force began planning a series of visits, "to show the flag," and in March and April, these visits were made by the USS *Manley* and the *Nassau*, and 800-foot amphibious assault ship, complete with combat helicopters on board.<sup>12</sup> We see, then, how rapidly U.S. authorities implement U.S. military policy in this region.

Because of the increasing strength of the popular-democratic forces in El Salvador—and increasing resistance in Guatemala itself to the military regime—U.S. pressures on

Guatemala (especially in activating and coordinating the military policy in support of the junta in El Salvador) have reached a very high level. An influential Guatemalan businessman-landowner commented that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State William Bowdler and his predecessor Viron Vaky "have been very active here in Central American politics, trying to decide for us what we should do."<sup>13</sup>

In the last few months, there have been rumors of U.S. military advisers in the Guatemalan jungles training a right-wing army (composed of Somoza's ex-National Guards, numbering between 3,000 and 5,000, and other right-wing expatriates) for an invasion of El Salvador.<sup>14</sup> The maintenance alone of such a large number of Nicaraguan ex-guardsmen calls for significant U.S. "economic" aid.

There is a new plan, code-named "Pinzas de Hierro" (Iron Pincers) underway to combat guerrilla activity. This plan, under U.S. direction in the Honduran-Guatemalan border region, involves coordination between the members of the Salvadorean, Honduran, and Guatemalan armed forces.<sup>15</sup> Another aspect of this cooperation was revealed recently. In April 1980, three Salvadorean air force chiefs were killed when their plane crashed while flying back from a secret mission in Guatemala. In May, 600 fleeing refugees were massacred by Salvadorean National Guard at the Sumpul River as they attempted to cross over into Honduras and the Honduran army refused to let them cross.

The class nature of these activities is seen by the fact that members of the Guatemalan National Liberation Movement (the powerful rightist party) said recently that their "troops" were ready to fight alongside the right in neighboring El Salvador, if necessary.<sup>16</sup> The *Post* then added, "Western diplomats believe that Guatemalan rightists have already crossed into that country in recent weeks." A Guatemalan businessman was also quoted as saying, "The key to Guatemala's anti-communist crusade is winning the battle next door in El Salvador. If that fails, we remain isolated... We send financial support for the struggle in El Salvador." Furthermore, several Guatemalan men were arrested with the leader of the abortive May 2 right-wing coup in a farmhouse several miles outside of San Salvador on May 9.

In addition to all these activities, Guatemala and Honduras are apparently helping Israel provide military equipment and



training for mercenaries from several countries. For example, in February 1980 Alberto Ramos, Secretary General of FAPU (a popular organization), stated that approximately 700 mercenaries trained by Israeli military advisers and staying in Guatemala were organizing for a coup in El Salvador in conjunction with right-wing groups.

#### **VENEZUELA**

The government of Christian-Democrat Herrera Campins has also been compliant with U.S. interventionist plans. Salvadorean officers are trained in Venezuela, and a military mission headed by Venezuela's General Andrade met with El Salvador's Minister of Defense in March. There is mounting evidence, since a recent U.S. diplomatic visit to South America, that Venezuela is collaborating with the U.S. in planning a military invasion of El Salvador, with the collusion of Colombia and Peru. The U.S. would like to set up an Andean Pact "peacekeeping force" ready for intervention, but Bolivia's present instability and Ecuador's sympathy for the Democratic Revolutionary Front have so far thwarted these plans.

#### **PANAMA**

Although there has always been a strong U.S. troop presence in the Panama Canal Zone, the Legal Aid Office of the Archbishopric of San Salvador is compiling mounting evidence that Salvadorean military are also being trained there in preparation for an escalation of intervention and repression.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The U.S. military role in El Salvador and the region is evident. Before summarizing the major conclusions of this paper, it is extremely important to understand that the U.S. role has nothing to do with U.S. national sovereignty and security, nor with "preserving democracy"; rather, this role maintains, defends and encourages the economic interests of U.S. multinationals. Therefore, the terms "U.S. role" and "U.S. interests" are synonymous with U.S. multinational interests, not those of the people of the United States.

The major conclusions regarding this role are the following:

1) The U.S. has been the main arms supplier to the region and to El Salvador. In addition, training of the military and the police forces has been directed by the U.S.

2) Arms sales from the U.S., military exercises and the

number of U.S. military personnel in El Salvador and the region have escalated tremendously in recent years, especially since 1979.

3) Through its military aid and guidance, the U.S. has actively sought to amplify national conflicts into regional ones. This internationalization has been carried out on three levels:

—First, through coordination of the military forces in the region, especially among the key members of these forces. Since the beginning of the 1960's, joint forces, e.g., CON-DECA, have continuously intervened in various countries in support of the oligarchical-military regimes and against the popular-democratic movements.

—Second, the U.S. has actively encouraged western countries (e.g. West Germany, Israel, Spain) to supply arms to El Salvador and to other countries in the region.

—On the third level, the U.S. has consistently and vocally raised the false Cuban "threat" to its security and the stability of the region. U.S. economic and strategic interests in Latin America required an increasing cooperation among the anti-democratic and repressive regimes in this region. The "Cuban threat" was, in part, raised in order to facilitate this cooperation, especially military cooperation.

4) After the success of the popular-democratic revolutions in Grenada and Nicaragua, the U.S. has been taking even more extreme measures than it did in these countries in order to prevent a popular-democratic revolution in El Salvador. These facts have made it increasingly clear to the poor, churches, and the middle classes in these countries that their socio-economic liberation is directly and visibly standing in contradiction to U.S. imperialist interests, and the mutually dependent oligarchical-military interests. It must be stressed that this emerging clarity of the exploited sectors is taking place in *all* the countries in this region.

5) The broadening and deepening of the confrontation between the popular liberation forces and the oligarchical-military forces is to a great extent the product of U.S. policies in El Salvador and the region. The extreme repression of the people and of the church, and the inability of the people to effect change through years of peaceful attempts, is a by-product of the U.S. role in El Salvador, and this fact is recognized by the Salvadorean people.



6) Due to all these factors, the progress of the Salvadorean revolution strengthens the inspiration of the popular-democratic forces in the various countries in this region. Simultaneously, the progress of the Salvadorean revolution weakens the U.S./oligarchical-military forces in El Salvador and, therefore, in the entire region.

The success of the Salvadorean revolution—the overthrow of the present regime, the abolition and replacement of the existing state apparatus by a popular-democratic one, the elimination of repression and the end of U.S. domination over the lives of the people of El Salvador—would show the popular liberation movements in the other countries that such a transformation of the economic and social relations and the elimination of repression is possible.

It is precisely this situation, and its dynamics, which make the unfolding revolution in El Salvador of special importance. The U.S. regime has taken all necessary measures for a direct intervention in this region.

The forces the U.S. supports and sustains in the region, with the accompanying extreme repression and the danger of an outright U.S. intervention, make it imperative that all U.S. left, progressive and democratic sectors organize and fight against these very real possibilities. North Americans should be aware of the nature of the regimes the U.S. sustains and accommodates.

*U.S. military intervention already exists in El Salvador, that U.S. military personnel are already present, and that U.S.-made tanks, helicopters, arms, bombs and napalm are killing Salvadoreans daily.* This intervention must be stopped, and the complete withdrawal of U.S. economic and military aid and of the U.S. military presence must be demanded. It is the responsibility of all freedom-loving people in the United States to oppose U.S. backing of the repressive oligarchical-military regime in El Salvador, and to support the popular liberation forces of that country in their just struggle for freedom.

## FOOTNOTES

### PART I.

1. *New York Times*, March 19, 1974.
2. *New York Times*, May 17, 1976.
3. For more examples, see Richard Barnet and Ronald Muller, *Global Reach*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1974.
4. *Washington Post*, February 14, 1980.
5. U.S. Department of Defense, *Congressional Presentation Document: Security Assistance Fiscal Year 1979*, Washington D.C., 1978.

### PART II

1. See "Supplying Repression," by Michael Klare, The Field Foundation, 1977, p. 20.
2. U.S. Department of Defense, *Congressional Presentation Document: Security Assistance Fiscal Year 1978*, Washington D.C., 1977, p. 323.
3. U.S. Agency for International Development, *Phaseout Study of the Public Safety Program in El Salvador*, Washington D.C., 1974.
4. *Ibid.*, page 3.
5. *New York Times*, April 17, 1980.
6. *Washington Post*, March 15, 1980.
7. *New York Times*, May 8, 1978.

### PART III

1. *New York Times*, March 12, 1980.
2. Interview with Marianella Garcia Villas, president of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, in the Intercontinental Press, April 28, 1980.
3. *Miami Herald*, April 14, 1980.
4. *Washington Post*, April 17, 1980.
5. *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1980.
6. *Washington Post*, April 17, 1980.
7. *The Nation*, December 15, 1979.
8. *Guardian*, April 23, 1980.
9. *Washington Post*, March 23, 1980.
10. *Latin America Weekly Report*, April 4, 1980.
11. *Washington Post*, April 21, 1980.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Miami Herald*, April 14, 1980.
14. *Guardian*, March 26, 1980.
15. *Latin America Regional Report*, May 2, 1980.
16. *Washington Post*, May 15, 1980.



# OPEN LETTER FROM THE LATE MONSIGNOR ROMERO OF SAN SALVADOR TO PRESIDENT CARTER

Mr. President:

February 17, 1980

Some news has appeared recently in our national press which disturbs me considerably; it is that your government is studying the possibility of supporting the present government junta with economic and military aid.

Since you are a Christian who states an interest in defending human rights, I will venture to offer you my point of view about this news accompanied with a concrete request.

It disturbs me deeply that the U.S. government is leaning towards an arms race in sending military equipment and advisers to "train three Salvadorean battalions in logistics, communications and intelligence." In the event that this news is accurate, your government, instead of favoring greater peace and justice in El Salvador, will undoubtedly aggravate the repression and injustice against the organized people who have been struggling because of their fundamental respect for human rights.

The present government junta and, above all, the armed forces and police agencies, disgracefully have been unable to show any capacity to resolve, structurally or in political practice, our grave national problems. In general, they continually return to the use of repressive violence, producing wholesale deaths and injuries—even much more so than our recent military regimes, whose systematic violation of human rights was denounced by the International Human Rights Commission.

The brutal tactics recently unleashed by the security forces, killing the occupants of the Christian Democratic Party headquarters, were apparently unauthorized by either the government junta or that Party. The attack is evidence that neither Christian Democracy nor the junta really governs the country. Rather, political power is in the hands of unscrupulous military men who know nothing more than to repress the people in support of the interests of the Salvadorean oligarchy.

